***Do We Still Need Experts?***

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1. **Introduction**

In the wake of the spectacular success of Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), philosophers have paid a great deal of attention to testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when hearers downgrade the credibility of testimony due to prejudices about its source; for instance, when members of a jury disbelieve a woman’s testimony because they explicitly or implicitly think that women are prone to exaggeration. Most of the large literature in response to Fricker’s work has focused on testimonial injustice. The remedy for epistemic injustice is almost always listening better and giving greater weight to the testimony we hear, on most philosophers' implicit or explicit view.

But Fricker identifies another kind of epistemic injustice: hermeneutical injustice. Hermeneutical injustice has received less attention, and much of that attention has focused on how it should be understood – so any short description risks being highly misleading. However, it’s safe to say that on the standard interpretation someone is subject to hermeneutical injustice when (inter alia) they are unable to fully understand or express their own experience because they lack the resources appropriate to conceptualize that experience. There is a possible tension between these kinds of injustice, we suggest: sincere testimony may be misleading (may fail to identify significant harms the testifier is subject to, or may fail to register a harm’s magnitude, or to categorize it as the kind of harm it is) in virtue of a lack of hermeneutical resources. This tension raises the possibility that there are situations in which experts - those who possess specialized hermeneutical tools - may be able to correct the testimony of those who experience harms in virtue of their identity.

Everyday testimonial injustice, of the kind that most discussions of the issue have in mind, arise through identity prejudice: when H downgrades S’s testimony because S belongs to a group that H (implicitly or explicitly) sees as less reliable than others. Experts may be every bit as susceptible to such prejudices: it’s all too easy to find contemporary cases of medical doctors (for example) misdiagnosing women and members of minorities or undertreating them because the doctors refused to accept their testimony at face value (Zhang et al. 2021; Hoffman et al. 2016). In downgrading testimony in this kind of way, H harms S by refusing to see her as an equal participant in inquiry (of course, H may harm S in other ways too; in this instance, by undertreating her pain).

This sort of case is neither distinctive of interactions between experts and laypeople nor a genuine dilemma. There are no grounds for thinking that the patients thus disrespected are in any way less than fully competent with pain concepts, or any more likely to be unreliable in reporting their pain.[[2]](#footnote-2) A more distinctive and more difficult problem arises for the expert when she doesn’t doubt the sincerity or the competence of the testifier; rather, she takes herself to possess conceptual resources that the testifier lacks and uses those resources to make their testimony *more* intelligible. For example, suppose that H receives testimony from S about S’s own experience. H is faced with the question of how much credibility to assign this testimony. If H does *not* assign it very high credibility, then H risks committing a testimonial injustice. But if H is alive to the possibility of hermeneutical injustice, then in its light, H might suspect that S’s testimony is not to be taken at face value because S lacks the conceptual resources to make sense of or articulate her own experiences. She assumes that S is doing her best to explain her experience, and has no reason to doubt S’s abilities, but takes S to lack concepts that would make testimony about her own experience more accurate. If H is reasonable in suspecting that S lacks these tools, H confronts a genuine dilemma. If she fails to assign high credibility to S’s testimony on the grounds that S lacks the tools to articulate her own experience, then H risks committing a testimonial injustice. On the other hand, she might fail to respond to S’s real problem if she accepts S’s testimony as is.

In this paper, we first consider whether such situations pose a real dilemma by looking at possible objections to the idea of hermeneutical injustices that could be corrected in such a way. We also consider whether expert knowledge can truly provide such a corrective. After demonstrating this is a genuine dilemma, we then consider the possibility of cases in which epistemic injustice might be reduced through such correction: in which *increased* risk of testimonial injustice might serve to decrease epistemic injustice in the longer run. We also suggest how the obvious dangers of a too great readiness to see testimony as in need of expert correction might be mitigated, and how the expert might suggest corrections without ceasing to listen.

1. **Questioning Hermeneutical Injustice**

If hermeneutical injustice – as Fricker describes it – is a genuine and genuinely significant problem, then the above dilemma may arise for well-informed and conscientious experts. One way to avoid the dilemma is therefore to deny that hermeneutical injustice arises in the form she presents. A number of writers have argued that the potential victims of hermeneutical injustice – the members of historically-disadvantaged groups – are rarely in the position of needing outside help to articulate their experiences. Quite the contrary: their unique social position and experiences motivate them to develop conceptual resources of their own, which *outsiders* typically lack.

It's unsurprising that feminist philosophers have not been very receptive to the suggestion that the non-dominant lack the hermeneutical resources to understand their own experiences. After all, standpoint epistemology has been one of the major achievements of feminist thought, and standpoint epistemology emphasises that the different experiences of dominated groups typically lead to the development of epistemological resources that may allow for a *better* understanding of aspects of reality than that afforded by mainstream resources (Hartsock 1983, Collins 1990, MacKinnon 1989). Since dominant group members have no need to attend to micro (and macro) aggressions or to placate the powerful, they don’t tend to develop the tools to understand these experiences. If group members commonly encounter situations that give rise to experiences, or encounter situations that while rare, are very significant for their flourishing, they won’t respond with puzzlement: they’ll respond by bringing to bear the resources they’ve been forced to develop. Because identity correlates systematically with differences in experiences, one’s “social identity may ‘open one up’ to evidence in ways that aren’t modeled by traditional epistemologies” (Toole 2019).

If the non-dominant typically have a better, not worse, conceptual capacity to articulate their distinctive experiences, Fricker-style hermeneutical injustice seems likely to be a relatively marginal phenomenon. Mason (2011) suggests that the non-dominant do understand their experiences well enough, but that naming might give them capacities they otherwise lacked: for example, “to articulate the systematic nature of the phenomenon” (Mason 2011: 298). Kristie Dotson (2012) charges Fricker with assuming that cultures are monoliths, with a single set of hermeneutical resources. The dominant culture might lack the resources to make sense of the experience of a subordinated group, but the group is likely to possess “alternative epistemologies” which can include sub-cultural hermeneutical resources (31). Mason (2011) points to a similar concern, expressing scepticism about Fricker’s central example of hermeneutical injustice, the naming of ‘sexual harassment.’ As Mason notes, Carmita Wood’s actions prior to the naming were not those of a person mystified by her experience. She sought solidarity with others *because* she understood it. Naming allowed her to communicate the experience more easily, not to understand it.

More concessively, Pohlhaus (2012), Mills (2017) and Beverley (2020) have each suggested that the non-dominant may lack needed conceptual resources when they are unable to develop a community in which to share experiences and elaborate concepts. Mills argues that the nakedness of white aggression and exploitation of black people, and their exclusion from white society all but ensured that black people would develop a sophisticated conceptual counter-hegemonic worldview. Mills contrasts the way in which this exclusion from white society conduced to the formation and maintenance of black communities, thereby providing an environment in which collective cognitive resources could develop, with the relative isolation and the divided loyalties of white women. Alternately, Beverley notes that trauma may isolate individuals from community and give rise to Fricker-style hermeneutical injustice.

All of this points to hermeneutical injustices, conceived of as an individual’s own lack of hermeneutical resources, being infrequent or anomalous. However, another way of thinking about hermeneutical injustices is that they occur not when the disadvantaged lack conceptual resources to articulate their experiences, but when the advantaged lack them and so cannot hear what is being said to them:

There is perhaps a small number of cases in which someone sits alone in her room and is harmed by being unable to properly articulate her experience to herself because the cultural lexicon lacks the ideas she needs to do so. But such cases are in the minority. Typically, the subject is harmed because other people impose ill-fitting meanings on her, irrespective of whether alternative, better meanings are available in the cultural repertoire (Romdenh-Romluc 2017: 7).

Analogously, Arianna Falbo (2022) has identified what she calls *positive* hermeneutical justice, which arises not “from a dearth of hermeneutical resources, but from the overabundance of distorting and oppressive concepts that function to crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of an available and more accurate concept” (344). For example, third parties might fail to classify someone as a ‘rapist’ not because they (or anyone else) lack the concept but because their application of the concept is blocked by the ‘golden boy’ concept. These arguments demonstrate that a purely individualistic definition doesn’t capture the interactive nature of some hermeneutical injustices. The testifier might have accurate concepts to describe their experience, but those concepts can still be ignored by listeners or structurally suppressed. While a standpoint is widely understood as a perspective achieved through collective epistemic resource-sharing and consciousness raising, the epistemic resources developed do not often enter dominant discourse.

We maintain that there may be hermeneutical gaps which experts could help fill, and that sometimes these gaps are indeed due to a hermeneutical injustice. In doing so, we do not deny that hermeneutical injustices are uncommon, that alternative epistemologies exist, and that these often get ignored or overridden in dominant discourse or do not receive appropriate uptake. This gives us two possible targets of expert intervention. The expert might correct the testimony, providing hermeneutic resources the testifier lacks. Or the expert might correct the resources of recipients of the testimony, providing them with the resources they need to understand the testimony. In both cases, the tension between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice remains. Further, it complicates considerations about expertise where experts are members of dominant groups and testifiers are not.

To say that it is possible for an expert from a non-dominant group to have advanced or specialized hermeneutical resources unavailable to some members of the marginalized group in no way conflicts with standpoint theory, as standpoint theorists do not argue that epistemic advantages on marginalization come solely in virtue of said marginalization. At very least, not all members of marginalized groups are able or willing to develop a standpoint. Nevertheless, an expert who is not a member of a particular marginalized group has limited access to the full epistemic resources of said group. However, that hasn’t kept more individualistic epistemologists from losing sight of the alternative epistemologies and ways of knowing defended by standpoint theorists.

For instance, Dror (2022) aims a critique at what he takes to be the *strong inversion thesis* held by standpoint theorists, arguing that that there is no “in principle” epistemic advantage available to the oppressed. Dror advocates instead for what he calls a *weak inversion thesis*: “Socially marginalized people, by virtue of their social location, *tend to* have a superior epistemic position than non-oppressed people when it comes to knowing things about the workings of social marginalization that concern them, because they *tend* to have more relevant experience and motivation (experiences and motivation which are *in principle* open to the non-oppressed)” (2022: 6). The strong inversion thesis is surely a strawperson: standpoint theorists do not argue that all oppressed people have an epistemic advantage over all non-oppressed people (Wylie 2003). We might be willing to sign up to the weak inversion thesis as stated; however, it’s clear that Dror means the principle to be much weaker than we can accept.

On his view, privileged people can easily pay attention and engage in activities that ensure an equalisation, or better, in epistemic position (though he does concede that this is a demanding activity for some people in some circumstances). We think this is false. First, Dror is wrong in thinking that the experiences that “would inform them about the workings of social marginalization” are widely available to the privileged (2022: 4). Allies from dominant groups can, as he says, join picket lines or volunteer in organizations working for racial justice, but they cannot know what it’s like to have an identity that follows them *everywhere* and *cannot* be shed. Someone who wants to experience the microaggressions directed at a member of an oppressed group might (say) wear a burka and improve their epistemic position, but the important thing about the burka for them is that they can remove it whenever they like. One cannot experience what it is like to be identical with a body racialized in a different way. That is, there is no first-person experience of a *lived* identity(Alcoff 2006) supporting inferences and informing further individual or community knowledge creation processes. There is a clear difference between *knowledge about* and *experience of* social marginalization.

If that was all Dror had wrong, a defensible inversion thesis might be nearly as weak as he thinks, given that he denies that experiences of what it is like to be a certain kind of person is important for propositional knowledge. But his fundamental assumptions are also wrong. He works with an extremely thin conception of knowledge and belief. On his conception, knowledge is expressible in propositions that are context-independent: the proposition has the same meaning for everyone, no matter what else they believe or feel. This profoundly asocial conception of knowledge has been heavily criticized; in fact, the last few decades of analytic epistemology have focused heavily on the deeply sociocultural nature of knowledge-creation, belief, meaning, understanding, and the exchange of epistemic testimony. Further, this social turn has integrated epistemology with philosophy of mind and cognitive science in ways important for understanding the development of language, belief systems, epistemic acts and practices, and self-understanding, to name but a few areas of interaction. Propositions can be context-dependent in a deep way, such that those who belong to a particular culture will have a different and in some ways deeper understanding of those propositions (Medina 2012).

Why should sociocultural context and situatedness make this sort of difference to what we know? While we certainly don’t intend to provide a proper definition of that notoriously difficult word, we maintain that cultures and sub-cultures are partially constituted by sets of cognitive phenomena: beliefs, dispositions to feel and to respond, a sense of when and how to offer testimony, and so on (however these might be characterized) (Collins 1990). Members of different cultures differ systematically in these dispositions and epistemic practices (Solomon 2006). Of course, we share a great deal in common: enough to guarantee intertranslatability – and thereby ensure that at least some propositions fit Dror’s conception of thin propositional knowledge. But when there are cultural, and subcultural, differences, systematic differences in what we understand by socially relevant propositions are to be expected. We may all be able to know, in a thin sense, that *Black people are subject to systematic racism in the contemporary United States,* but we will differ in our capacities for making inferences and predictions on that basis.

The point is more general: while we want to acknowledge the value of Dror's paper, we think its limitations are important because they exemplify the strong hold that individualism still has on epistemology, despite being decades into epistemology’s social turn. Reductive individualism conduces to the thin conception of knowledge because such thin knowledge is what is available to individuals regardless of their social setting or degree of embedding. Adherence to this kind of individualism makes different ways of thinking difficult. It leads to a thin understanding of the very notions needed to make sense of the epistemic advantages that may follow from social identities (‘culture’; ‘identity’) and to a correspondingly thin conception of what advantages might be available. If we accept these thin concepts, we can see the epistemic advantages only as Dror does: as consisting in greater motivation and a disposition to pay greater attention, and conclude, with him, that identities do not conduce to knowledge that isn’t accessible to everyone who is motivated to pay attention. This individualistic ideology continues to be a hindrance to a truly social epistemology (Levy and Alfano 2020, Longino 2022). It well illustrates the forces working against what we might, in a more old-fashioned vocabulary, call consciousness-raising. Ideology makes it difficult to grasp counter-hegemonic notions and to accept them once grasped. Conversely, it makes other notions mere ‘common sense’. It alters the burden of proof, and requires the theorist to struggle to articulate alternatives (while the status quo, just as hard to express, requires no such expression to be accepted).

Literature on intersectionality shows how membership in multiple groups can shape one’s epistemic resources and cognitive processes (Collins 2017). Intersectionality entails that there are differences in epistemic resources across individuals who are similarly situated in some but not all salient respects. Since standpoints are collective achievements, they reflect identities that are widely, if only partially, shared. They can also reflect multiple marginalizations, as exemplified in the epistemic resources specific to the standpoint of black women (hooks 1984; Collins 1990).

Can a privileged person acquire the network of concepts that allows her full epistemic access to the knowledge available to the oppressed in the thin propositional sense? In principle, yes. But the primary access to the network is socialization, via a lived identity, into a way of experiencing the world. While other routes are, again in principle, available, and it is also true that it is possible to be socialized into a way of seeing as an adult, without possessing the kinds of identity that is associated with such socialization, both routes are rarely accessible. Both because socialization typically requires that experienced members of the culture trust the person and see them as one of *us*, and because socialization is often a matter in part of differentiating oneself from others, socialization into identity groups is difficult for those who don’t share the identity. It is in all cases not something that is achieved easily: it takes years of deep immersion.

We believe that these facts can help to underwrite the epistemic privilege associated with standpoint epistemology. As Alison Wylie (2003) has emphasised, standpoint theory is not committed to the *automatic epistemic privilege* thesis. A standpoint is much more than a set of thin propositional beliefs; it is an achievement that is hard won; the result of work by multiple individuals, almost always in some degree of dialogue with each other. But a standpoint is *not* equally open to everyone willing to work hard and in good faith; social identities, because they reflect and are correlated with cultural and subcultural differences, make them more or less accessible to different people.

1. **Many Epistemologies, Many Resources**

We want to return to the initial dilemma, clarifying the idea that there are genuine cases where an expert might have hermeneutical resources unavailable to the testifier that can help make their testimony more accurate. Though we may be willing to acknowledge different types of expertise (academic, practical, first-person, standpoint, etc), the literature on the topic has thus far failed to “appropriately situate ‘expertise’ within the complex systems and relationships of knowing to which the status is dependent” (Respess 2020, p. 107). Many areas of expertise have specific rules and licensing which establish expertise, as with medicine, academia, construction, and law, while other kinds of expertise lacking these formalities are often downplayed or dismissed. Medicine and other clinical settings have been taken up in the literature as a prime example of a place where different kinds of expertise come into conflict and where oftentimes asymmetries between patient and provider can be exacerbated due to a number of things including cultural differences (Kirmayer 2012), gender and race biases (Cooper-Patrick et al. 1999), and biases or lack of access to epistemic resources due to social positioning (e.g. incarceration) (Pitt 2019).

One of the things we often expect from experts is that they will use specialized epistemic resources to make testimony intelligible within a specific expert community. It would be inappropriate to say that a harm is committed when a patient expresses the belief that they have broken their arm in a fall and then a medical expert correctly identifies it as a distal radius fracture so it can be properly treated. Thus not every gap in hermeneutical resources is the site of a hermeneutical injustice. What creates a hermeneutical injustice is the lack of access to conceptual resources or the ability to create conceptual resources because of one’s sociocultural position, and where the lack of resources in some way *harms* the agent. A lack of expertise is no such injustice without further qualification.

Let’s return to the potential conflict between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Again, a testimonial injustice occurs when the epistemic credibility that should be assigned to a testifier is diminished due to a prejudice on the part of the speaker (explicit or implicit). For a testimonial injustice to occur, a prejudice (namely an identity prejudice) must be shaping the listener's credibility attribution to the speaker. Because of this, our dilemma is possible only in very specific, although fairly common, kinds of interactions. The most common type of interactions would be (1) between an expert who is a member of a dominant group and a testifier who is a member of a non-dominant group/s, and (2) between an expert who is a member of a non-dominant group/s and a testifier who is also a member of a non-dominant group/s (same, different, or overlapping groups). Experts are certainly often guilty of such injustices; can they nevertheless sometimes be correct in overriding patient testimony? Dotson (2012) expresses scepticism that this might occur: rather, any hermeneutical lack is likely to be on the *experts’* side:

To imagine that the person with the underresearched medical ailment remains in the same state of unawareness as general society is, generally, absurd. Alternative hermeneutical resources often arise in response to circumstances such as these. Though dominant hermeneutical resources may remain behind on conceptualizing his ailment, his knowledge may not be lagging at all, in terms of the ability to render it intelligible. What is barred, then, is gaining the appropriate uptake by those utilizing dominant hermeneutical resources as opposed to the alternative resources he and others in his same position have developed (40).

As we discussed previously, we think this is an important example of a type of hermeneutical injustice. However, there are cases in which it is the patient who lacks hermeneutical resources. Psychiatry provides an example as both a site of quite pervasive testimonial injustice and also of expert provision of hermeneutic resources that allow patients to make sense of their own experience.

People diagnosed with ADHD as adults often report that the diagnosis - which is, of course, an expert opinion - enabled them to make sense of their own experience. They often report that finally, everything made sense for them (just a few of the very many first-person reports: Bourque 2022, Muir 2023, Nogrady 2022, Rear 2022). Academic research indicates that these reports are common, though far from universal: many people report that a diagnosis led them to reevaluate their own lives (Fleischmann and Fleischmann 2012; Hansson Halleröd et al. 2015; Holthe and Langvik 2017). Syrett (2018) reports that the phenomenon extends beyond ADHD to other diagnoses.

By themselves, these reports provide evidence that expert testimony can illuminate agential experience: an agent’s experience may be opaque to themselves and the diagnosis may provide them with the tools they need to clarify it. Perhaps this falls short of showing that testimonial and hermeneutical injustice can conflict, though. For there to be a conflict, patient and expert must be disposed to disagree on the nature of the patient’s experience: in at least some of these cases, though, the patient may be aware that their experience is opaque to themselves. However, conflict cases do occur. Many patients report initially rejecting the diagnosis, but these reports are open to interpretation: did they reject it on the grounds they took it to be false or because they did not want the stigma or the medicalization? Some, however, are clear: patients sometimes report they rejected the expert opinion on the grounds that it did not apply to their case (Lavelle 2017).

Do these experts risk committing a testimonial injustice? If their perception of the patient's testimony about her experience is influenced by their awareness that she belongs to a marginalized group, then yes, it is possible that their judgement could be skewed by identity prejudice. Should the expert be wrong (for example, the patient has the hermeneutical resources and is not being heard) then their judgement to assign less credibility to her testimony would be both a testimonial injustice *and* a hermeneutical injustice--even if their intention is to mitigate the latter.

Examples of this kind of testimonial injustice abound. Kidd and Carel (2018) offer an example of a woman whose testimony about her symptoms was judged inaccurate by medical professionals, and resulted in her being provided the wrong treatment. For ongoing epigastric pain in the night, she was prescribed anxiety medication which gave her no relief. She then expressed feeling as though interest in alleviating her pain waned and it was no longer taken seriously (Mandell and Spiro 2013). Kidd and Carel point to the testimonial injustice possible, both because she is a woman and because of what they call pathophobic prejudices (negative attitudes against illness or ill persons).

Imagine, though, a case where something presenting as a similar physical issue actually stems from anxiety. For example, panic attacks are often thought to be heart attacks when first experienced, as the symptoms of panic disorder have been said to “mimic” symptoms associated with an acute cardiovascular event (Potokar and Nutt 2000). A physician might correctly identify the cause of the symptoms as panic disorder even though a patient insists they are having a heart attack. Should the physician harbor any identity prejudices toward the patient, they might be committing a testimonial injustice while also making a correct diagnosis and offering the patient more accurate hermeneutical resources to ensure they receive the appropriate care and the ability to more accurately describe their experience. It is often the case that, as with ADHD and autism, people may not realize they have a panic disorder previous to such a diagnosis. Here, still, a physician might actually commit a testimonial injustice in not listening to their patient due to an identity prejudice, and yet mitigate a hermeneutical injustice by offering better resources for self-understanding. This stands especially for the patient who has, because of their sociocultural status, been left out of conversations and denied epistemic resources about mental health.

The existence of cases is unsurprising. While people may usually have good insight into their occurrent experiences (though there are surprising differences in people’s introspective accuracy; Hohwy 2011), it is a harder task to make sense of one’s experience over time. ADHD is constituted by patterns of behavior and attention, and other people are notoriously more reliable at detecting such patterns in our behavior than we are. We ought to expect that our individual attempts at making sense of our own experience over extended periods of time are corrigible, and not only by experts.

We certainly don’t suggest that expert judgment is routinely more reliable in making sense of individual experience. Misogyny in psychiatry has frequently taken the form of dismissing, downplaying or pathologizing women’s experiences (Ussher 1991; Klonoff et al. 2000) and the same story plays out with regard to racialized individuals (Ali 2004). (Even) in psychiatry, it may well be that when the testimony of members of marginalized groups conflicts with that of the experts, the former should take precedence. But cases of appropriate and beneficial expert correction appear to occur. As Buchman et al. (2017) point out, experts take their testimony to be authoritative: “Being the authority on the matter, experts also have the prerogative to reject patients’ claims as not credible according to the former’s chosen scientific frameworks. … Their expert status bestows them the authority to override patients’ self-reported experience or preferred methods of management” (p. 33). If we’re right, they should be far more cautious in attempting to exercise this authority, but cases in which they’re (epistemically) justified occur.

1. **Decreasing Hermeneutical Injustices**

Prescriptions for reducing both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices often involve advocating for individual exercises of epistemic or intellectual virtue. For example, Fricker herself advocates for hearers to be more actively aware of possible failings in trust while receiving testimony in order to cultivate testimonial sensibility (2007). To alleviate hermeneutical injustices, she likewise urges listeners to cultivate reflexive sensitivity to the possibility of hermeneutical gaps. Following Fricker, we might similarly evaluate hermeneutical corrections in terms of the virtues or vices of individuals. In this section we’ll explain why we think this approach is insufficient, and why more structural ways of addressing the problem are necessary.

One way to consider hermeneutical corrections is perhaps as a kind of epistemic paternalism. An epistemically paternalistic practice involves non-consensually interfering with the epistemic processes of another with the intention of improving their epistemic position or process of inquiry (McKenna 2020). To be clear, the one practicing epistemic paternalism believes they are doing so for the good of the other. Epistemic paternalism can involve intervening on the epistemic inquiries of another in a way intended to guide them toward better epistemic results. If the aim is to put one in a better epistemic position, we might think epistemic paternalism could also include the imposition of hermeneutical resources on behalf of a testifier, then, so long as this is done in good faith and intended to benefit the testifier in some way.

Viewing these situations as a kind of epistemic paternalism provides some framing for further questions about hermeneutical correction. For example, positionality is always a relative term. In questioning what it means to put one in a better epistemic position, we have to ask to whom one is being positioned better: to the testifier themselves, in which case we might suspect a Fricker-type hermeneutical injustice, or to the expert, in which case we might suspect a hermeneutical injustice that involves exclusion of non-dominant epistemologies. To qualify as reduction of hermeneutical injustice, the expert's intended reduction of hermeneutical injustice must be aimed at decreasing harms to the testifier, not merely making the experience more intelligible to the listener. Again, this assumes a lack of resources, not the possession of alternative resources. The testifier may be perfectly intelligible to those who share the hermeneutical resources that she possesses. This shows that being put in a better epistemic position is not something we can reduce to individuals - it is a relational concept.

It is unclear how epistemic paternalism might offer further clarification or tools to alleviate anything but the rare case of Fricker-style hermeneutical injustice for particular individuals. More concerning might be experts not putting in enough effort to make the patient’s first-person knowledge intelligible in the first place. Buchman, Ho, and Goldberg suggest that more epistemic humility is needed in clinical settings: “While HCPs possess expert knowledge in pain management, they do not have direct access to their patients’ experiences. In search of the most appropriate clinical approach, epistemic humility requires an inquiry into the patient experience. For example, the HCP can invite the patient to tell her story and embrace a willingness to incorporate the patient’s narrative into her professional worldview (Atkins 2000)” (Buchman et al. 2017, p. 38). As above, we are concerned that preaching intellectual humility does not get at deeper systemic issues (Levy 2020). The exercise of epistemic humility by experts when receiving testimony might help mitigate more problematic aspects of epistemic paternalism, especially when the expert rushes to a judgement that the testifier has incorrectly described their own experience, or some aspect of it. It could be that humility about the accuracy or priority of their own hermeneutical resources might lead the listener to be more open to alternate epistemic resources. However, this would still stop short of taking into account the ways that the hermeneutical resources of an area of expertise are shaped by its members. Areas of expertise governed largely by particular demographics tend to take up research lines that reflect their interests, and thus funding and resources get channeled into the topics of value to those members:

Healthcare providers’ social environment, personal background, worldview, and other values also influence how they observe their patients’ symptoms, how they investigate and interpret their histories, what diagnoses they offer for reported and observed symptoms, and what among the increasing number of treatment options they recommend. It is within this complex combination of social and institutional structure, historical and economic realities, medical advances, as well as power relations that medical experts define issues and goals. (Buchman et al. 2017, p. 33)

For example, medical research in the UK, largely dominated by men, has produced over five times as much research on erectile dysfunction as it has on premenstrual syndrome, even though the latter affects 90% of people who have periods (ResearchGate 2016). It is one thing to transparently reflect the interests and values of one’s sociocultural identity, as with standpoint expertise; it is quite another to do so while purporting to be objective. The hope of good faith on the part of the expert gets even more complicated, as interests influence even the modes of intelligibility preferred within their fields (e.g. a liberalist preference for addressing EDI or climate issues in terms of individual responsibility rather than collective or structural change).

Another concern is the ways in which different types of expertise, because of the wide variance in perceptions of their credibility, are more likely to be silenced by calls for epistemic humility. Especially in the cases of those who have developed standpoint expertise, we have to be sensitive that calls for epistemic humility can easily be weaponized *against* marginalized perspectives and marginalized epistemic resources as a means of maintaining focus on dominant interests. It is likely that demands to adhere to dominant epistemic paradigms and practices are at the root of many hermeneutical lacunas those paradigms are not intended to fill.

Exercising epistemic humility in receiving testimony might help mitigate more problematic aspects of epistemic paternalism in some contexts, especially when the expert rushes to a judgement that the testifier has incorrectly described their own experience, or some aspect of it. As above though, it is hard to see how this kind of individualistic approach offers the right tools for systemic change or leads to the widespread adoption of alternate resources. Even in cases in which the expert is justified in providing hermeneutical resources to the testifier, it is unlikely - to say the least - that these resources should simply supplant the testifier’s self-understanding. The testifier remains a knower, and new resources likely provide her with an enriched capacity for understanding that is unavailable to the expert.

So what kinds of interventions are needed to mitigate hermeneutical injustices? We think the only way to reduce hermeneutical injustices at an ongoing structural level is to have marginalized interests, through standpoint expertise, represented and respected *within* other fields of expertise. Feminist theorists have long advocated for this as a way to address prejudices in the sciences–for example, Longino (1990) and Nelson (1990) both advocate for thinking of objectivity as a social virtue achieved by a community through its diversity. We want to clarify, though, that diversity alone (without standpoints) is insufficient for addressing hermeneutical injustices. Social identities *enable* the development of a sophisticated counter-hegemonic outlook; they do not guarantee that such an outlook will develop or that it will become widespread among groups with similar non-dominant identities. That said, intellectual work has preconditions, and we may expect insight from the relatively privileged among the marginalized. Marginalized communities typically have been excluded from the opportunities to reflect - either in dominant institutions like universities or in informal, grassroots, fora - but there have always been exceptions, and hermeneutical resources may be developed by such (relative) elites. Early feminist thinkers like Christine De Pizan and Laura Cereta came from relatively privileged backgrounds: it’s likely that their access to better education and time to reflect conveyed epistemic advantages on them. They combined a standpoint with access to dominant epistemologies, which may have made the flaws of the latter especially vivid to them.

Hermeneutical resources may typically be developed bottom-up and top-down simultaneously, when the emerging and partly embodied expertise made available by a standpoint meets the epistemic resources of the relatively privileged. This might happen collectively across stances, as those with standpoint privilege encounter those who lack it but are willing to learn from them, and to offer ways of contextualizing or developing the new insights. It can also happen within stances - i.e., without the direct input of the privileged - when members of marginalized groups themselves have access to more mainstream expertise. Above we mentioned that standpoints might develop, in part but importantly, through the work of relatively privileged members of marginalized communities: one reason this may occur is that such people may have mainstream expertise and standpoint expertise.

Lastly, we want to address the possibility that anyone could develop a standpoint, and thus fully contribute to the mitigation of hermeneutical injustice. We take this to rely on the (epistemically individualistic) view that experience, embodiment, context, and interaction are contributive rather than constitutive aspects of knowledge. For example, Tilton (2023) argues that it’s not necessary to belong to a marginalised group to develop the standpoint that is associated with group members. This supports the idea that inclusivity is merely moral or politically important, not necessarily epistemically important (Antony 2016). While we don’t argue that belonging to the group is strictly necessary, we do argue for a strong link between group membership and a fully formed standpoint. It is perhaps possible but very difficult for members of dominant groups to acquire such standpoints, because standpoints are partly embodied and enculturated. Unless one accepts a profoundly asocial and unembodied conception of knowledge - one we’ve already rejected - one should not think that an expert who is part of a dominant group can possess all the knowledge available to those with a standpoint. As we’ve argued above, this is problematized when we think of the ways that lived identity, sociocultural situatedness, and collective epistemic processes of knowledge-creation contribute to the collective development of resources. Further, if lacking knowledge developed through lived identity and consciousness raising, the privileged would not have a sense of the hermeneutical resources which are in need of development. This has been highlighted in arguments against the colonization of knowledge (Bailón & De Lissovoy 2018) and arguments that stress the epistemic importance of lived identities (Alcoff 2006). Tilton points out the apparent tension between a view like this and the widely accepted view that dominant ignorance is cultivated and wilful (Mills 2007). We believe these positions are compatible: white ignorance is predicated on a refusal to listen to or to accept the testimony from members of dominated groups. What is refused is a very valuable but nevertheless relatively thin sort of knowledge. A standpoint enables a much richer kind of understanding; lacking a standpoint makes it very much harder to generate certain sorts of knowledge.

Fricker is clear that on the canonical meaning of hermeneutical injustice, these arise from asymmetries in social power that lead to a lack of access to meaning-generating practices, such as "those sustained by professions such as journalism, politics, academia, and the law" (2007: 152). This leads to what she calls hermeneutical marginalization, where members of a non-dominant group have unequal access to a practice which could be significant for generating epistemic resources (and further, more widespread understanding) about their experience. The combination of the facts above suggests when it is most likely that an agent *actually* lacks hermeneutical resources to make sense of their own experience, while experts are in a position to correct them: when the expert and the testifier both occupy a shared sociocultural position, but the expert has had epistemic opportunities not made available that the testifier. Classic scenes of consciousness raising involve just such agents: the expert has had the time and resources to be able to acquire and to contribute to the development of feminist hermeneutic resources and can now share them with the testifier.

1. **Concluding Thoughts: Conflicting Expertise?**

Do we still need experts? Emphatically yes. But we also and urgently need to expand the range of people we recognize as experts. Experts, of the traditional sort - whose expertise is accredited by universities and similar organisations - will always be needed, because so much of human knowledge is only accessible to those who have had long apprenticeships in traditional disciplines. But expertise does not develop solely through such apprenticeships. Expertise in how oppression works and how it can be combatted and circumvented, expertise in understanding some of the very same phenomena that the traditional disciplines have sought to illuminate, also develops from within marginalized groups, when members have the opportunity and the resources to turn their lived experience into sophisticated conceptual tools. These experts, too, are urgently needed: their input is essential to addressing some of the most important challenges facing us.

In this chapter, we’ve argued that experts of both sorts are needed, but what is also needed is a way of negotiating conflicts that may arise between traditional experts and the testimony of those with different sets of lived experiences. The latter are themselves sometimes experts, and their testimony may be authoritative. But sometimes the conflict should be settled in favor of the traditional expert, and of course sometimes each has some insight unavailable to the other. We have argued here that individualistic epistemology offers only individual-based mitigation strategies with little systemic impact. Further, the thin conception of knowledge limits our understanding and ability to appreciate the depth of standpoint expertise. Addressing hermeneutical injustices in interactions is not enough; we need to address the hermeneutical marginalization that leads to these gaps. Negotiating conflicts between expertise, we argue, thus requires both a more deeply social and systemic approach. It involves a broader recognition of standpoint expertise and the ways that the perspectives gained by having standpoints improve other fields of expertise. Right now, non-traditional expertise is too often dismissed by those within the academy; overcoming that injustice is the most important measure for alleviating hermeneutical injustices.

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2. Nussbaum (2000) provides evidence that in certain circumstances members of marginalized groups might *under*report their pain. Whether that reflects hermeneutical injustice or rather an adaptive response to the knowledge one’s testimony is liable to be rejected is unclear. However, if Nussbaum is right, the undertreatment of pain in such cases is doubly wrong: it downgrades the reliability of a report that is *already* adjusted downward. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)